

NEIMAN-MARCUS OF TEXAS

Couture and Culture

WILLIAM SCHACK

AS A fashion center in the once remote city of Dallas, the Neiman-Marcus specialty store has achieved international fame. It is not nearly so well known, however, for being a strong cultural force in its community. Ever since *Fortune* devoted a fifteen-page study to it in 1937, it has been written up in magazines as diverse as *Collier's* and the *Saturday Review*, *Life* and *Vogue*, *Good Housekeeping*, and the *Manchester Guardian Weekly*. Although Macy's and Marshall Field's have been the subject of only a single book apiece, and Lord & Taylor's one-hundred-and-thirty-years' history has been covered in sixty-nine pages, one full-length book has already been devoted to this store in Dallas, Texas, another is on the way, and at least two more have been proposed. Neiman-Marcus is the only store that boasts a bibliography. A few writers have dealt with the store as a business, but most have rhapsodized over it as a purveyor of high style, a bizarre success story, or both. Much still remains to be said of its broader role in the community.

One of the proposed books on Neiman-Marcus plans to trace the parallel growth of the store and Dallas, but Dallas is only a part of its sphere of influence. Frank X. Tolbert's book, published in 1953, indicates that sphere of influence more accurately in its title, *Neiman-Marcus, Texas*. Without a touch of extravaganza, the store could hardly have attracted so much attention; nor

could it have played so prominent a role in the most flamboyant state of the union. We are familiar with Texas brag; the *Texas Almanac* is only a hundred-odd pages smaller than the *World Almanac*; but Neiman-Marcus claims part of the credit for civilizing the state. As a result of the store's influence, asserts Stanley Marcus, its president, "in a relatively short period, it was hard to tell [the new Texas millionaires] from any 'old money' group in America."

This influence was multiple. It began with the inculcation of "good taste" in clothes and home furnishings, and from there spread to many other spheres. As the store undertook extra-curricular activities on behalf of the community, it set an example that enforced the respect, and sometimes the imitation, of otherwise unbridled individualists. All this gradually—or can we say of an accomplishment that took fifty years, *swiftly*?—widened the horizon of the people of our last frontier.

Neiman-Marcus could hardly have succeeded in achieving its present status had it not first proved itself in its primary role as a seller of high-style merchandise. It was with regard to style that the store made its most striking departure from the policy of its original competitors in Dallas. As part of his doctoral thesis, a professor at the University of Texas compiled "Tales of Neiman-Marcus." No one has done as much for Sanger's, A. Harris, or Titcher-Goettinger's—all reputable retail stores in Dallas. By the quality and taste of its merchandise, its manner of presentation and promotion, and the aura surrounding it, Neiman-Marcus not only satisfied its customers but laid claim implicitly to authority in certain areas of culture and even in civic matters. It became a force against provincialism.

THE Neiman-Marcus specialty store of Dallas, which for the past fifty years has been propagating high culture along with *haute couture*, is one of Texas's more fabulous institutions. WILLIAM SCHACK, a steady contributor to COMMENTARY, describes the history of the store and its unique role in the community.

IN THE Dallas of 1907, starting a shop that offered *fashionable* ready-to-wear clothing seemed bizarre. At that time women who did not make their clothes themselves had their garments made to order. The directory of the city of 86,000 listed one hundred and fifteen dressmakers. Several well-established stores sold dress goods by the yard and had skilled seamstresses from New York and Paris on their premises. Less imaginative entrepreneurs than Herbert Marcus (father of Stanley), Albert L. Neiman, and his wife Carrie (sister of Marcus) would have established another store like the existing ones; many Jewish ex-peddlers who had saved their pennies to go into "legitimate" business tended to open popular-price stores. But the founders of Neiman-Marcus had never peddled, and their outlook was different—quite different: they intended to offer the wives of conservative businessmen and ranchers suits by Bradley of London and gowns by Lanvin and Callot Soeurs of Paris.

Marcus and his sister, both born in Louisville, and Neiman, who came from Cleveland, had all had experience in the better Dallas stores. In 1905 the two friends, still in their twenties, opened an advertising and sales promotion agency in Atlanta. It was so successful that, two years later, they were offered \$25,000 in cash for it—or stock in a local company known as Coca-Cola, together with the Missouri franchise for the sale of the new drink. They took the cash and in the fall of that same year opened their store in Dallas—which is why Stanley Marcus says that it was founded on bad business judgment.

Fifty years ago, Dallas businessmen said the same thing, but for a different reason: there was no room in the city, they maintained, for a store selling elegance. As late as 1841 Dallas had amounted only to John Neely Bryan, his Indian pony, and a pole tent measuring ten by twelve feet. Thirty years later, when the first railroad came through, the city still had only between two and three thousand inhabitants. With the nationwide economic expansion following on

the large-scale railroad building after the Civil War, however, the whole of Texas began to burgeon with farms and ranches and Dallas developed into the commercial and financial center of the North Texas blacklands. Though the area, as Frank Goodwyn points out in *Lone-Star Land*, called for a metropolis, Dallas was badly located for the purpose. Its founders had conceived it as a river port, and when this proved impracticable "Bryan and his fellow settlers found refuge in superlatives. If Dallas could offer prospective citizens no physical [geographical] inducements, then she could offer them personal and social inducements. She would astound the world with the extent of her inventiveness. Everything she had would be the biggest and best. Since Bryan's time, Dallasites have never been satisfied with modest projects." Neiman-Marcus had set up business in the right place.

By 1907 the population of Dallas had grown to 86,000, but some of its main streets were still unpaved; railroad tracks crisscrossed the busiest downtown streets; there were fewer doctors than saloons, and the concentration of drinking dives around Elm and Murphy, where Neiman-Marcus rented a shabby-looking building for an enormous \$9,000 a year, was so high that the store's first stock girl had a hard time persuading her parents to let her work there. Despite a Shakespeare Club and a symphony orchestra, the city was still a raw pioneer town. And if it could conceivably have been interested in exhibitions of the fine arts, it would have been startled to see them in a retail store. Neiman-Marcus itself was not yet thinking of sponsoring such things: it was concentrating on the art of its merchandise and on the art of selling.

Among those present at the opening of the store were "some uninhibited cowboys and wild-looking Indians from Oklahoma."* They could hardly have been more astonished by what they saw than a traveling

*The quotation is from Tolbert's *Neiman-Marcus, Texas*, as are all quotations in this article not otherwise credited.

salesman from New York by the name of Trotter, who, bored with the town, went for a stroll and encountered smart Fifth Avenue stuff within hailing distance of an array of saloons. Impressed as he was, he couldn't imagine the store as a going concern. As *Fortune* put it, "He'd give these Neiman-Marcus people a year; two years if they had plenty of money [they were already out of cash after paying for fixtures and a year's rent in advance]; three years if they didn't care what became of it." Thirty years later, *Fortune* itself thought the store had been a wild gamble and that there had been an element of luck in its survival.

IN ITS first ad, illustrated by drawings which had to be made in New York, the store announced that "exclusive lines of high-class garments have been secured, lines which have never before been offered to the buyers in Texas." The response was good. Cowboys and Indians were a negligible minority among the first customers. "Women in hundreds came, bought, and were enchanted," wrote Miss Zula McCauley, then advertising director, in the brochure celebrating the store's fortieth anniversary. "'You save us the long trip to New York or Paris to shop; now we can go there and enjoy ourselves,' said others." These were the people—the womenfolk of bankers, business executives, cotton, cattle, and oil men—toward whom the store shaped its policy and who in turn patronized it heavily. (The store also carried some popular-price lines, apparently as a hedge, but they were not stressed.)

It wasn't easy going. One of those who predicted the store's early demise was a competitor who tried to insure his forecast. He warned New York manufacturers not to extend credit to the newcomers, and in fact Mrs. Neiman on her first trip to the market had to pay cash—\$17,000 in all—for everything she bought. Just before the store's opening, she had a miscarriage, and Marcus came down with typhoid fever. The month after the store opened the panic of

1907 hit the city. In 1913 it suffered a disastrous fire, and since then there has been another serious fire and several minor ones. Yet the store made a profit of \$3,000 during the first few months it was in business, and except for two depression years has been in the black ever since. Six years ago the store built a handsome modern branch in the suburb of Preston Center. Two years ago it took over an established specialty shop in Houston. In 1955 the three units, combined, did a business of more than thirty-three million dollars, with a net profit of some three-quarters of a million.

The "exclusive lines" mentioned in the store's first ad were only a beginning. Before any shop in the city thought of competing with Neiman-Marcus on its own terms, it was obtaining sole sales rights in Dallas for the lines of many top-flight manufacturers, and exploring every new source of high-style goods as soon as it appeared—e.g., the West Coast for sports clothes, post-war Italy for a variety of accessories. Most out-of-town stores purchase their goods in the New York market through "resident buyers," who make selections for various non-competing stores. Neiman-Marcus has its own New York office. Its buyers often order an article with the condition that the manufacturer make certain changes, minor or drastic, in it. This sometimes arouses resentment on the part of manufacturers, but one maker of expensive shoes actually awaits Neiman-Marcus's criticism before beginning quantity production. Neiman-Marcus often designs its own jewelry and millinery and always designs its fur coats, capes, and stoles. Sometimes it has its own fabric dyed and made up to order. Nevertheless, the store must choose the bulk of its merchandise from the market offerings. Manufacturers' salesmen shrewdly let other buyers know what numbers the Neiman-Marcus buyers have favored. One department store head was so annoyed by these hints that he put a sign over his desk: "I Don't Give a Damn How Many Neiman-Marcus Ordered."

Not only is scrupulous care exercised in the choice of merchandise; the store goes

to almost fanatical lengths to make sure of the quality and condition of every article it sells. Every garment received from the manufacturer is put on a dummy for rigorous inspection. Merchandise other than apparel is often checked for flaws under a magnifying glass. The store has never put on sale goods damaged in any of its various fires, preferring to dispose of these through the Filene store in Boston, as it does its slow-moving items in general. (And Neiman-Marcus's prestige is such that Filene's actually advertises these items as being in effect Neiman-Marcus discards, on the assumption that Boston—for a discount—will accept what Dallas rejects.)

The interior of Neiman-Marcus's main store is attractive but not exceptional among stores of its class; and the Houston branch has been remodeled in its image. But in the new store in Preston Center, the design of which was controlled from the ground up, Neiman-Marcus was able to give the public an example of the kind of taste it had sought in its merchandise and demonstrated in its exhibitions of art. Even to the uninformed, the exterior of the Preston Center store reveals itself as of a simple contemporary idiom. It has an interior to match and a unified décor. In the Dallas store a pair of murals by Vertès and a rug by Miró are only casual decorations; the signs of the zodiac designed in wire by René Forsythe, of the store's art department, are more effectively placed in the store's dining room. In Preston Center the major decorative features are planned and integral: there are a Calder mobile designed for a particular position (though it looks like a dozen other Calder mobiles) and a playful colored glass mosaic by John and Elaine Urbain based on the Kachina figures of the Southwest Indians, the colors and motifs of which run throughout the rest of the decorative scheme.

BUT it is not the physical setting of Neiman-Marcus's merchandise so much as the way in which it is sold that has endeared the store to its clientele. Most high-price stores try to provide "personal" salesmanship

—the salesgirls are simply showing friends a good thing; but at Neiman-Marcus even top management does not disdain to appear on the floor. The present president is credited with having sold, informally, about \$5,000,000 worth of furs during his years as an executive. His father and aunt before him would think nothing of leaving a conference at the call of some important customer, and Stanley Marcus once spent three hours trying to help a woman buy a \$50 dress: to him she was important because she had superb taste and he could learn something from her likes and dislikes.

What the customers love even more perhaps is the aura with which the store surrounds its wares, on and off its premises. On Wednesdays, during the lunch hour, it stages a fashion show at the Hotel Baker; Thursday nights it puts on another show for career girls (i.e., those with not too much money to spend); occasionally it holds a style show for expectant mothers, with former models in that condition displaying maternity dresses. But its major show is the Fashion Exposition, which is held once a year and runs for five days. The elite of the fashion world are invited to the opening night, tickets for which cost \$25 a pair (the proceeds going to the purchase fund of the Dallas Museum of Art). Those for the second night are only \$5 each. One year the store received 10,000 requests for the 3,500 tickets available. Ten years ago, playing up to the outlanders' notion of Dallas's being a part of the Wild West, it called its annual event a Rodeo Fashion Show and held the première at the Flying L ranch not far from San Antonio. (Among the five different kinds of parties the store throws every year is a Western party; at this, as at the other parties, guests have all their expenses paid and every moment provided for: even a special "date bureau" is set up.) The year Texas celebrated the hundredth anniversary of its independence from Mexico, Dallas won the profitable honor of being the scene of the Texas Centennial Fair, even though San Antonio, where the Alamo still stands, or Houston, with its battlefield of San Ja-

cinto, on which the decisive battle for independence was won, had better historic claims. That year Neiman-Marcus staged a special show called "One Hundred Years of Texas Fashions" as a curtain-raiser to its annual Fashion Exposition of current styles; both affairs were so grandiose and elaborate that they were talked about for years. (So, possibly, were the shows the store put on in Mexico City and Sydney, Australia.) It was on this occasion that one of the most critical among the store's guests, Mrs. Edna Woolman Chase, editor of *Vogue*, expressing the sentiment of the store's starry-eyed clientele, told the local press: "I dreamed all my life of the perfect store for women. Then I saw Neiman-Marcus, and my dream came true."

Some years ago the store began to present, at its Fashion Expositions, special awards for design which have gone not only to outstanding designers themselves but also to people who have been helpful to them, and to "personalities" with exceptional taste in clothes. One year the store so honored Francis H. Taylor, then director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, for having made the Museum's costume collection more accessible; in general, the winners of these awards—Christian Dior, Salvatore Ferragamo, Nettie Rosenstein, Dorothy Liebes, Dolores del Rio, and Henry Dreyfus (to cite a few)—have been names which reflect glamor on the institution which honors them and on its customers.

As a business, it is obvious, Neiman-Marcus has been an unqualified success. But it has also achieved its other goal in large part, which is to refine the taste of the community. To begin with, it worked on its own customers. Among its 100,000 charge accounts are 3,500 which are good for more than \$2,000 worth of purchases a year, and a considerable number for \$100,000. As if it were ashamed of catering so much to luxury and vanity, Neiman-Marcus asserts that only a comparatively small number of its customers are ultra-wealthy. That may be so, but they must account for between a third and a half of its total sales. Although the store broadened its customer base during

the 1930's and now offers dresses for as low as \$25 in three "popular price" departments, the \$100 dress is the best-seller even among these and "popular prices" range up to \$350. That still excludes more people than the many it admits, for the median income of a Texas urban family was, in 1949, only \$3,083. After the big money, it is the customer who spends perhaps \$250 a year on clothes whom the store is cultivating, apparently without relaxing the standards of style, quality (within the price range), and service which have given it its reputation.

Neiman-Marcus may be in large part indirectly responsible for the general improvement in dress of the average Dallas woman, if what George S. Perry says in *Cities of America* is true: "Chain-store buyers buy one class of goods for their other Texas stores, but a simpler line for Dallas, so that their customers can look as if they bought their clothes from Neiman-Marcus."

How much of all the acclaim Neiman-Marcus receives is genuine? As I have indicated, its enthusiasts are not all local; in fact, the store does more than half its business with out-of-towners, having four hundred customers in Chicago, fifteen hundred in New York, a couple of dozen each in London and even in Paris. These can't all be transplanted Texans. Myself no expert in the world of *haute couture*, and with a puritanical distaste for the almost universal concentration of Occidental womankind on fashion, I have not inspected a sufficient number of feminine wardrobes in Dallas to speak with the authority of a pollster. But I will say that, standing at the doors of Neiman-Marcus, you do see, entering and leaving, an almost unbroken procession of uncommonly well-dressed women. The color is fresh; fabric, lines, and workmanship are impeccable. Here is high style this side of "finery," true chic this side of chi-chi.

What barbarities in taste the Texan new rich might otherwise have committed with all the money they have spent at Neiman-Marcus! Appropriately enough, it was a cattle-and-oil heiress, Electra Waggoner, who

set the pace: she was the first to spend \$20,000 there in one shopping trip. (Having forgotten a few trifles, she returned the next day and spent another \$20,000.) "She loved life," did Electra Waggoner Wharton Bailey Gilmore. "She loved to shop at Neiman-Marcus." Every day it sent her a batch of dresses, and in the original packages of the New York and Paris makers, for she would not wear a dress another woman had tried on. Indeed, having always on hand three hundred and fifty pairs of shoes, and new ones coming in all the time, she hardly ever wore the same pair of shoes twice.

Electra Waggoner is gone now, but the store has a pretty satisfactory replacement in a West Texas customer who mails it a check for \$11,000 every month and is usually in arrears, "for he is blessed with a wife and a daughter and a mistress with good taste in clothes and jewels." Then there was the wife of an Oklahoma oil man who liked to have the store all to herself when she went shopping. To accommodate her, the store would let her come in for a few hours after its doors were locked for the day. Although she was not a frequent visitor, she managed to leave \$300,000 with Neiman-Marcus in one three-year period. There was Mike Thomas, who twice cornered the cotton market but died broke—he was a \$100,000 customer. There was C. M. ("Dad") Joiner, a man who freely quoted Shakespeare and Lincoln, who at the age of sixty-five brought in oil at Overton, the biggest gusher in Texas up until that time.* "He moved to Dallas to be near Neiman-Marcus," where he and his daughter, Bess Joiner Harris, spent literally millions of dollars over the years. (Not all of the big customers are home folk. A family of three from Morocco,

*Oddly enough, the founders of the store did not take the oil developments in Texas into their calculations; indeed, they do not seem to have been aware of them when they started the store, although there were already nearly three hundred wells in Corsicana, some fifty miles south of Dallas, and a sensational strike had been made as early as 1901 at Beaumont, near the Louisiana border. "The oil booms happened in just about the right sequence to keep Dallas and Neiman-Marcus prosperous."

shopping for matching vicuna coats in New York without success, enplaned for Dallas and found at Neiman-Marcus not only the coats they wanted but enough other fine things to make a purchase of \$75,000.)

AS EAGER as it is to guide its customers' taste, Neiman-Marcus is still a business and has to strive for maximum sales and profit; it must stimulate, not curb, the spending of its customers: it cannot therefore banish from its premises the barbarian wearing the correct dress suit or the beautiful gown. Out of sheer devotion to standards, however, Neiman-Marcus will often forgo even a sizable sale or a profitable deal. Herbert Marcus declined a shipment of costume jewelry on consignment, with a guaranteed profit of \$25,000, because "he would be ashamed if he had seen one of his customers wearing . . . the over-ornamented bracelets and pins." Stanley Marcus has on occasion gone so far as to ignore the dictum that the customer is always right, and often he has done this in the interests of the customer himself. He was called in to pass judgment on a mink coat—Neiman-Marcus sells more fine minks than any store in the country—which an old customer was considering for his sixteen-year-old daughter, about to leave for college. Marcus didn't even consider the fit or style: he was thinking that the girl would be criticized by her classmates for such ostentation and said so. In place of the mink costing several thousand dollars, he suggested a \$295 muskrat. Father and child were outraged, and left. But the next day, after a family consultation, the father returned and bought the muskrat. Having two daughters of school age himself, Marcus may very well have been solicitous for the welfare of this young customer. Grown-ups have to look out for themselves.†

The store not only encourages its cus-

†But the store can be paternalistic. A rich customer from Oklahoma, celebrating the victory of his alma mater's football team, was jailed for drunkenness and smashing up things. Asked whether anyone would go bail for him he said that his only friend in Dallas was Neiman-Marcus. The friend provided bail.

tomers' check-book megalomania, it is not itself above the most extravagant display. Christmas at Neiman-Marcus is a thing Santa Claus never dreamed of. Last year's handsome gift catalog offered a couple of live tigers, "giant or economy size"; the baby tiger, wearing a gold charm bracelet around its neck, was priced at a hundred dollars; the big one, tricked out with diamonds, emeralds, rubies, "and other assorted splendors," at a million. Of course this was only a stunt, but I am sure management would not have been *completely* surprised if someone had bought the big tiger. For the store decks out its Christmas trees with diamond necklaces and mink capes. When it lugs a miniature merry-go-round into the toy department, some customer always insists on buying it to adorn his lawn for Christmas Eve. Running out of *things* to offer, the store in its final promotion last Christmas suggested helicopter rides with dinner for two as "the last word in gift ideas for anyone who has everything."

Neiman-Marcus compounds the follies of its customers by helping them present their gifts in style. One mogul, having bought furs, jewels, silver, perfumes, china, and other knick-knacks, for his absent family, wanted to surprise them with something more spectacular on their return. Neiman-Marcus display men took over a big room in his house and duplicated a series of store windows as settings for the gifts. Manikins wore the furs and jewels; spotlights illuminated the scene.

Nor will the store entirely ignore the cost of being a cultural catalyst. It once had an interior decoration department (called the Decorative Galleries) which tactfully helped prevent the very rich from sparing no expense to proclaim an untutored taste. The department did a good job but ran into money troubles. Sometimes customers would return special purchases which the store could not dispose of elsewhere. Sometimes the staff would decorate a mansion harmoniously, only to discover that they could not do as much for the minds of the couple who came to occupy it: the marriage

would break up when the job was finished and the bills would go unpaid. The Decorative Galleries must have taken a severe loss if the store gave the department up, for Neiman-Marcus was willing to sink a quarter of a million dollars into its men's department before it succeeded in branding enough Texas males to put that department in the black.

NOT unnaturally, since fashion design is an applied art, Neiman-Marcus found that the main field in which it could make a cultural impact on Texas—high culture as well as *haute couture* being one of the store's goals—was in that of the fine arts. Edward S. Marcus, executive vice-president in charge of the Houston branch, has been active in the Young Collectors Group in both Dallas and Houston. Stanley, too, is a venturesome collector, mixing familiar—though not the most familiar—names with unknowns. I found a distinct personal quality in his choice of American, Mexican, and European painters and sculptors. He has also a large number of primitive masks which interest him, not only as aesthetic objects but also for such answers as they may suggest to the moral question: why masks at all? Recently he bought a *gemmaux*, a new art of glass mosaic bonded by transparent enamel. The first work in this medium translated the paintings of the modern French masters, who praised it highly.

It was Stanley Marcus who introduced Neiman-Marcus's fashion shows, and who then thought of holding art exhibitions in the store at the same time. Stores everywhere have so-called tie-ins with well-publicized local events, including art exhibitions, but these are held usually in a museum, not in the store itself. Early last year Neiman-Marcus related the colors of its spring merchandise to those of Etruscan frescoes, reproductions of which were then on view in the Louvre and photographs of which were run in *Life*. But it brought to its own floor, in 1946, Navajo sand paintings; in 1948, Gauguin canvases, wood-engravings and woodcuts, as well as an exhibition of recent

Picassos; in 1951, thirty Matisse paintings; the following year, some sixty pieces of contemporary sculpture; in 1954, ancient and contemporary Mexican and American mosaics. Fifteen of the new French *gemmaux* are scheduled to be shown this year. Neiman-Marcus borrows these works from private collections, museums, and art galleries. Most of the exhibitions are related to the store's merchandising promotions. Thus paintings may serve to introduce the season's new colors. The Matisse exhibition supported two colors the store was featuring: Matisse red, which was a fairly standard scarlet, and Matisse yellow, which really was some special blend of the artist's that had now been translated into fabrics. The quite radical sculpture show introduced new lines and forms to justify the shapes and lines of the season's gowns. The connection may have been a little forced, but whether the correlation between the art and the merchandise on display is real or fanciful, there is no doubt that a great many people visiting the exhibitions—customers and outsiders, grown-ups and youngsters from the schools—are exposed to art they would not otherwise come to know, for the local museum is quite young and its collection is notably weak in modern masters. Possibly, too, the visitors are able to look at art less self-consciously in a store than in a museum.

OF THE Neiman-Marcus art exhibitions without direct tie-in, an example is the one put on last year of imaginary portraits of famous people as children by Marcel Vertès. Marcus saw these in a New York art gallery and, thinking they made a happy group, bought them all and exhibited them in both the Dallas and Houston stores. The primary purpose here was to entertain the public. Incidentally, perhaps—but importantly—it suggested an association between the store and the famous people portrayed.

In any case, Marcus frankly and without humbug says that the first purpose of the exhibitions, like that of any other of the store's non-merchandising activities, is promotional, and that broadening the horizon

of the public and improving taste are a "cultural by-product" of its main business, selling. One need not look down on a cultural any more than a chemical by-product; and there have been cases in the chemical industry where the by-product eventually proved to be more important than the compound originally sought. Even when the store uses art directly for selling, it is still creating these by-products, as when it commissions a Saul Steinberg and a Ludwig Bemelmans to design its gift wrappings. Even the dullest must get from these a sense of exuberance and wit not evident in either the advertising or textual illustrations of the magazines they read, as they must get some faint intimation from the best work in the store's exhibitions that the art of framing has no limit.

Is there a suggestion of "packaged culture" in the artistic "gift-wrap"? Does it show a want of respect for art to use it in a form which is here today and torn to pieces tomorrow? But the Japanese prints we admire today were once used for wrapping paper, and who can say that they did not contribute their share to the grace of Japanese ways? There has also been a revival of interest in occasional—which is another name for "practical"—music: witness Hindemith's defense of *Gebrauchsmusik* (music for use). When George Antheil was in Dallas to hear the première of one of his violin concertos, Stanley Marcus challenged him to compose a musical background for the Fashion Exposition to be held during the store's fortieth anniversary celebration. Antheil came through with a suite, *Carnival of the Beautiful Dresses*, and a rationale: "It would be wrong to write music for a fashion show," he said, "if one were convinced that the only great proper music was the kind that frowns deeply. As I do not believe this for a moment, my conscience not only allows me to write music for a splendid fashion show but also commands it. So I have endeavored to write a series of gay, little and unpretentious pieces that might be played by a small orchestra and still say what I mean. Had I written them for a concert pianist they might well

have developed into another *Carnival*, only not as talented as Schumann's."

WHETHER one charges the Marcuses with fostering packaged culture or not, the reality of their sense of responsibility to culture, as well as to other public interests, is demonstrated by the extensive role they play in community affairs, away from their store.

Dallas businessmen are said to be unusually civic-minded—to such an extent that they will make it extremely uncomfortable for any newcomer to the city who does not within a reasonable time begin to participate in its affairs. Herbert Marcus did not have to be told of his debt to Dallas and Texas: a great money-raiser, he helped to bring the Chicago Opera Company to the city, to found a well-known private school for girls (though his own children were all boys), a medical college, and Southern Methodist University. *Fortune* described him thus: "With his mobile Jewish expression, Herbert Marcus quotes Plato or Flaubert at you, displays a Canaletto in his dining room, and dreams of owning a Renoir." Some individuals who knew him more intimately thought that his interest in literature and art was superficial. But there is no doubt that this self-educated powerhouse of a man did believe that helping to build a better city was his duty as well as good for business. His death was commemorated in a resolution of the state legislature.

Herbert Marcus and his sister Carrie Neiman had four sons between them, three of whom are now active in the business, and who were accordingly brought up with a strong sense of communal responsibility. Lawrence Marcus is a member of the Central Highway Committee of the Dallas Chamber of Commerce and of the Greater Dallas Planning Council. He is a director of the St. Mark's School for Boys and of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, and president of the Carrie Marcus Neiman Foundation, which is assembling an extensive collection of American and European fashions to be housed in some public institution for the benefit of students and designers. Law-

rence is also active in the affairs of Temple Emanuel (he is the only one of the four brothers, so far as I know, who belongs to a synagogue).

Besides his participation in the Young Collectors Group, Edward S. Marcus was one of the backers of Margo Jones in what became perhaps the outstanding little theater in the country, and was active in its affairs. He is also a director of the Dallas Heart Association and a trustee of the Southwest Medical School Foundation and of the Texas Research Fund, which has developed crop-rotation programs to restore fertility to the state's depleted blacklands. An amateur cattle breeder, he is also a member of the Mid-Texas Aberdeen-Angus Association.

Diverse as his interests are, Stanley Marcus is the one who most completely represents the store's extramural role. Like his father, he is a dynamo, if a soft-spoken one. When he first entered the store in 1926, after graduating from the Harvard School of Business Administration, his chief extracurricular activity was the Texas Book Club, which printed fine editions of classics (and a short story by Faulkner not published elsewhere then or thereafter). Paradoxically, the more he became involved in the business (he has been executive vice-president for twenty, president for six, years), the greater the range of his outside activities. Today he is associated with a dozen local and a score of national civic groups concerned with business, art, music, education, labor relations, the United Nations—the latter not too popular an institution in Texas. Most recently, he headed a campaign to raise \$200,000 for a Garden Center in Dallas, which will be a showplace as well as a source of practical information for gardeners.

Stanley Marcus has also necessarily involved—some of his fearful associates say endangered—the store in his extracurricular activities. I am not now referring to his many organizational connections mentioned above, but to his independent acts as a citizen who takes the basic American political principles literally. In 1944, Homer P. Rainey, president of the University of Texas, was dis-

missed by the board of regents after a series of conflicts which had stirred up the whole state. What the basic issue was behind all these conflicts was made plain by the students of the university, who staged a protest strike: in the mock funeral they arranged, "academic freedom" lay in a coffin at the head of the procession. Two years later, when Rainey ran for governor on a platform which antagonized many businessmen, Marcus publicly supported him. Though Rainey was defeated, many of his projects were subsequently put into effect. Marcus's own reward, while the campaign was on, was to be called a Communist.

LAST year he was confronted with as serious an issue closer to home. A traveling exhibition called "Sport in Art," arranged by the American Federation of Arts and sponsored by *Sports Illustrated*, a Luce publication, was scheduled to be shown at the Dallas Museum of Art. Neiman-Marcus was the local co-sponsor, and had underwritten certain expenses of the show. But before it reached the city, the Dallas County Patriotic Council, on the ground that four alleged pro-Communist artists—Leon Kroll, the late Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Ben Shahn, and William Zorach—were represented, exerted pressure to have the show canceled. Several trustees of the museum stood firm against this pressure, and were supported by the Dallas Park Board (which is responsible for the museum) and many private citizens. The show went on, quietly enough, for it was entirely innocuous (what the Patriotic Council objected to was the *support* of artists with subversive views), but the people who were still angry about it included Neiman-Marcus customers who showed their displeasure by withdrawing their patronage. To one such customer in Houston, Marcus wrote a long, dignified letter of explanation in which he recognized "the insidious practices of Communists and Communism," but held that the pictures in question could only "help to make Americans proud of their country and aware of their great heritage." Nor, though he deplored the controversy, did he deny

that he agreed with the trustees the Council had attacked. In conclusion he said: "I do not ask that you agree with me. . . . I merely hope that you respect the integrity of my opinion and the fact that it proceeds from complete and undiluted dedication to the traditional principles of our nation and our culture. . . . I assure you that I correspondingly respect the sincerity of your view."

This was something very much more than an attempt to win back a customer. Marcus owns a picture by Ben Shahn painted around a thesis of Martin Luther which anticipates a traditional American principle: "I have the right to believe freely, to be a slave to no man's authority. . . . No man can command my conscience." This he had reproduced in full color and used as a holiday greeting card. Again, though he is a member of the American Council for Judaism, which if it does not repudiate the State of Israel would assign it a minor role in the life of the American Jew, Marcus also works with the Dallas representatives of the American Jewish Committee. (No fanatic, Marcus said ironically, when I asked him whether he had visited Israel, that he was afraid to because he might be converted. I am told that he is accepted by his conservative friends because he has a way of stating dissenting opinions with such objectivity that no one can take offense.) If a day should come, Marcus has said, when he can't sell merchandise and think as he pleases, he'll give up selling merchandise.

Nor has he ignored the most important issue in the South today. Although Dallas has a small Negro population, it subjects them to the exclusions common to the South. No store serving white people will let Negroes buy articles which have to be tried on, such as hats and dresses. Neiman-Marcus sells some Negro customers by mail order, but Stanley Marcus has not been satisfied with this compromise. Several years ago he consulted a lawyer friend about ending the exclusion of Negroes from the store. When he was advised against it, he suggested that if Negroes opened a quality store of their own he would help them with their buying

and merchandising problems. This echo of the now discarded doctrine of "separate but equal facilities" did not reflect Marcus's real feeling, for he again raised the question of admitting Negroes to his store, this time at a staff meeting. When none of the other executives supported him, he blew his top. "What should we do—stand in front of the store with a shotgun to keep them out!" If the time was not ripe for the major step, Marcus at least rectified a correlated evil—discrimination in employment: three years ago he began to hire Negroes in the store's service departments.

Hardly the stereotyped businessman, this member of so many civic organizations, and also of eight social clubs, a champion table-hopper but an able administrator, too, a thrower of fabulous parties who has more friends than one man can be intimate with—perhaps that is why he is a collector of masks and, not often but periodically, has spells of the blues which keep him away from the

store and the world which is too much with him.

Inevitably the name of Neiman-Marcus has been seized on and made a matter of snobbery. Hundreds of purchasers of coats have asked that the store's label be sewn in upside down, to be the more easily readable when the garment is thrown over the back of a chair. There are many such stories. A customer who had just been through an earthquake in California wrote the store *in all seriousness*: "I was fashion-conscious to the last and wore a Neiman-Marcus suit into the hotel lobby after the earthquake hit at 4 A.M. Some of the guests' taste in dress for the occasion was awful. . . ." But for women who can stop well short of such an extreme, the store has brought a generous measure of refinement in dress and home décor. That is its prime business, just as the wider role of the Marcuses in the cultural life of the community has been, in part, their pleasure.